

I Think I Made You Up by VerityR

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Summary:

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I Think I Made You Up

Author's Note:

Oops!... I did it again. Couldn't resist doing a Jonathan companion. You don't have to read the Nancy equivalent for this to make sense, though! Title taken from Sylvia Plath's Mad Girl's Love Song.

Jonathan had never really appreciated how nice it was, his boring little life. Before Will went missing, he'd spent most of his time quietly wishing he was somewhere else. High school, Hawkins— hell, the entire state of Indiana— it was all just a prologue to the *real* beginning of his life. A formality to endure before getting the fuck out of dodge and moving to New York, where important people did important things. More often than not, school was for sleeping, since graveyard shifts meant more cash and less people to deal with. There were only one or two classes he bothered to put effort into anyway. Jonathan had never been good at pretending to care.

But now there was Nancy.

There was this song, an older one, that his dad had always liked to play in the car. Everyone in America's dad, in all probability. The kind of song that just blends into the fabric of your life without calling too much attention to itself. But then— and it only takes once— you listen a little more closely to the lyrics and realize you never knew what it meant, before. Of course, this means you start to hear the song everywhere: it's blaring from open car windows, it's on every radio station, it's always stuck in your head.

That was Nancy.

And that was the kind of crazy knowing Nancy made him. Bad poetry crazy. Sappy mixtape tape crazy.

So, yeah. Jonathan wasn't exactly waiting for his life to start anymore. His little brother was home, his mom was happy, and the monster was slayed. Added bonus? He had a fairly compelling new reason to show up to school.

There was no more dread at the bell ringing, the halls flooding with the too-close bodies of his rowdy peers. Because he'd look for Nancy. "Look" might be the wrong word; Jonathan was aware of her without even trying to be. As if, like a bat or a radio, Nancy was emitting a frequency only he could hear. They were two of a kind, reaching for each other through the dark. And then there she was, at her locker, biting her lip. There, drinking from the water fountain. Chatting amiably with a teacher, because of *course* she was.

Nancy kept being Nancy, meaning she flitted through the halls like she owned them. Jonathan kept being Jonathan, meaning he watched her and said nothing. If anything had changed between them, this much hadn't.

Which wasn't exactly a good thing; Jonathan honestly felt more creepy than he had watching her through a half-shuttered window. At least that hadn't been premeditated. Jesus, was that ever a low bar. He needed to get a fucking grip. But not noticing Nancy wasn't an option.

Besides, he and Nancy actually spoke now. That was something, even if he was still too chickenshit to initiate conversation. Jonathan found he preferred talking to Nancy exponentially to *watching* Nancy. It was maybe messed up how much that surprised him, but he did have a fairly poor track record with talking. So far, he'd yet to screw up too majorly, which was pretty easy, as there wasn't actually anything between them to screw up in the first place.

There wasn't. Really. Probably? He assumed. Because she was still with Steve fucking Harrington.

Nancy's blatant lack of interest in him wouldn't have been so bad, if not for Steve. Because it wasn't just that Jonathan was poisonously jealous of him— although, yeah, Jonathan would have to be fairly deluded to deny that. Thing was, wherever Nancy went, Steve was never far behind, calling Jonathan "dude" and "man" and generally feeding into the pretense that they were friends. Jonathan longed for a time when he could hate Steve Harrington in peace, without having to talk to him. He was a very hateable type: douchebag car, douchebag hair, douchebag friends. And, sure, Steve had sort of saved his life. And dumped the douchebag friends, besides. That

didn't mean they had to be bosom buddies.

And it didn't mean Jonathan thought Steve was good enough for Nancy.

Though that was a cop-out, wasn't it? This idea that Jonathan could impartially decide who Nancy should date. As if there could ever be some other guy whose presence Jonathan *wouldn't* resent.

It wasn't as if Jonathan was this big expert on girls. Or relationships. Or people. But still, something about him and Nancy felt not-quite normal. And he didn't think it was just that he was in love with her. Hard to say. He hadn't been in love before.

It was almost funny. Being such a keen observer of humanity (read: friendless loner), Jonathan used to prided himself on being able to tell what people were thinking from a gesture, an expression. But now, when there was someone whose thoughts he actually cared about, all of that seemed like utter bullshit.

Like the photograph. The one he shouldn't have taken. Most Nancy-related trains of thought led to the photograph he shouldn't have taken.

The narrative he had superimposed on the photograph was a familiar one. A story Jonathan had told himself for so long, he'd convinced himself it was real. In Bumfuck, Indiana, being any less than normal was a hazard to your health. If Jonathan was going to survive, he had to play the game by an improvised set of rules. And so he did: It wasn't that he was weird; no one else in this hick town could think for themselves. It wasn't that he was a loser; being popular meant you were destined to peak in high school. It wasn't that he was unwantable; pretty girls were just stupid or shallow or naive.

Some pretty juvenile half truths, sure. But life, like photography, was all about framing. Jonathan was prone to observation, with a camera and without. He always saw what was there, but occasionally, something important was out of focus.

Nancy Wheeler earned the distinction of being a pretty girl Jonathan had actually spoken to. What had been background became

foreground. Crisp, clear, in-focus: she was pretty, but unaware of it. Bookish, but eager to prove herself to idiots like Tommy and Carol and fucking *Steve*.

Seeing Nancy at that party, with those people, acting the part of the wannabe popular girl, let Jonathan believe all his presumptions rooted in lust and loneliness and jealousy might actually be true. Every beat of every interaction played out like a bad teen movie: the beer guzzled, the pools pushed into. Did they not notice? How their rebellions played like cheap parody? The lighting was wrong, though. More horror movie than romp. It made a strange picture. Actually, it might make for some *good* pictures.

And, hey, he had his camera.

By the time Nancy was half naked in the window, Jonathan had constructed an entire series in his head out of these clandestine snapshots. Like a fastidious nature documentarian, he captured them: the rebellious teenagers in their natural habitat.

And then there she was, the perfect visual metaphor. The wide-eyed ingenue stripped down, free for a moment from the world of adolescent pretense. No trendy clothes or flirtatious smiles. She performed for no one.

Problem was, Nancy Wheeler was not a metaphor.

As soon as he had an interaction with her without a camera lens between them, that became painfully clear.

Nancy was more than bookish or pretty— she was quick, clever, good in a fight. She was willing to do whatever it took to help the people she cared about, no matter the danger to herself. No matter who believed her. Not to mention, a hell of a lot better shot than him. It seemed less and less likely that this was a girl whose biggest problem was that she couldn't be herself.

Now, when Jonathan looked at Nancy, Nancy looked back. It was at once undeniably better and inconceivably harder. When Nancy smiled at Jonathan, it wrecked him for entire afternoons. Rendered him temporarily incapable of fine motor control.

Before, Nancy was a player in the world according to Jonathan. Now, he drove himself crazy wondering about about her. Knowing there was so much of her life he wasn't privy to. Hoping that she was okay, those times he wasn't looking. There was a distance in Nancy's eyes that hadn't been there before. Like she was forever watching a horror movie, waiting for the scare. Steeling herself for the other shoe, inevitably dropping.

Despite himself and his own selfish interests, Jonathan hoped Nancy was only like that around him. That when she wasn't looking at Jonathan Byers, her eyes were bright and focused. Maybe Jonathan reminded her of fear. That would be okay, as long as she was happy when he wasn't there.

That's the real reason Jonathan watches Nancy from afar, even still; he has no way of knowing what she's thinking. No matter how many guarded sighs or smiles half-hidden in her hands he sees, Nancy Wheeler is an enigma. Jonathan wants her. But more than that, he wants her to feel safe. To be happy. And if Jonathan isn't the one for that, well, okay. He'll wait for the enigma to come to him.

And if she never does? Well. Maybe, one day, that'll feel okay too.